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Wednesday, January 28, 2009

Residents' message after travellers lose eviction appeal:

DETERMINED: Crays Hill residents gather in force at a previous protest about the travellers' site.



NOW GET OUT!

David Arnold

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PEOPLE living next door to one of Europe's largest illegal traveller camps finally have something to celebrate, and the message is stark - **CLEAR OFF!**

The Court of Appeal ended a seven-

year nightmare for locals last week by saying that about 450 illegally camped gypsies at Dale Farm, Billericay, and Hovefields, Wickford, must pack up and leave.

But, in a last-ditch attempt to stay, travellers have launched a desperate appeal with the House of Lords. Now an agonising week-long wait ensues to

see if they are successful

If they are, it could be another two years before they are eventually turfed off.

Local resident and treasurer of Ramsden Crays Residents' Association Sally Aungier, 45, said: "We are obviously very pleased, but we are now concerned about the eviction.

"Since I have been here, the numbers at the primary school have dropped drastically and we just want to get back a sense of normality."

Other residents told the Gazette of

their hell as they are met with a barrage of abuse every time they show their faces, while bottles, bikes, balls, wrappers and other rubbish are hurled into their gardens.

● Continued on p4

Special report p4-7

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Dale Farm - the facts

- There are currently between 400 and 500 legal travellers at Dale Farm who will be going nowhere.
- The eviction affects two sites. About 400 people could be evicted from Dale Farm and 50 from Hovefields in Wickford.
- The council has a total budget of £2million for the eviction, which includes hefty legal bills of more than £750,000.
- The remainder is earmarked for the clean-up of the land, which the council will try and reclaim from the travellers.
- Bailiff company Constant and Co has dealt with several Basildon council evictions in the past and could again, but the process will be rendered out over the next few weeks to find the best value for taxpayers.
- The eviction will be filmed by both sides for legal reasons, amid claims from travellers that bailiffs are heavy handed and counter claims that travellers will lie to launch legal claims.
- The Oxford Dictionary definition of a gypsy says it is a word for a Romani or a traveller.
- The word derives from Egyptian, as in the Middle Ages the Romans were believed to have come to Europe from Egypt. In fact they dispersed from an original home in north India.
- However, over the years the word gypsy has been commonly used to describe nomadic groups, including Irish Travellers, even though they are not part of the Romani people proper.
- Both Romani gypsies and Irish Travellers are classed as ethnic minorities under the Race Relations Act.
- Gypsies at Dale Farm and Hovefields are of Irish origin, but many dispute their claim that they are real Romani gypsies.

We're not going without a fight

Family's heartbreak at being forced out of their chalet

GIPSIES: Our sorrow

FIGHTING back the tears the eldest of three generations says she is "heartbroken" that her family has to move on.

As the news broke on Thursday morning crowds of families gathered at the McCarthy home, next to St Christopher's Community Centre, to conduct interviews with the media that surrounded the illegal part of the camp. Mary Ann McCarthy, 68, was visibly shaken by the news that after living there for seven years she will have to go, along with her seven children and her 17 grandchildren.

She said: "I just can't believe they are going to do this. This is my home where I live."

"We are human beings at the end of the day but it's not me I'm worried for the rest of my family, it's heartbreaking."

"What we are living in at the moment is a chalet, how am I going to move it at all? It

can't be pulled along by a car.

"I have experienced evictions before and they are not very nice I can tell you."

Mary Ann McCarthy, 13, named after her grandmother, said she was concerned for her grandmother's health but warned bailiffs they won't get an easy ride.

She said: "If people think we are just going to go without a fight then they are wrong, it's not going to be that easy for them."

Kathleen McCarthy, daughter of Mary Ann, said they didn't know what to do next. She said: "The major problem is that they are not providing enough legal sites for us to use, it would be one thing if they could tell us where to go but they aren't."

OUR HEARTBREAK: (l-r) Mariha McCarthy, Mary Ann McCarthy, Kathleen McCarthy, Joanna McCarthy, Mary Ann McCarthy, Nora Eagan and daughter, and Nora McCarthy.



Photos: Anthony Channer

by W. 20/01/09 07

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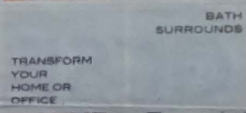
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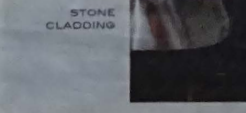
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Travellers special

Timeline...



1960s - Around a dozen caravans settle in Oak Lane, allegedly with permission, after being evicted from a site in Romford.

1970s - Part of Dale Farm is converted by the owner into a scrap yard for old cars, even though it is within the Green Belt.

1994 - Travellers start to buy up land and planning permission is gained through a Labour-run Basildon District Council. Travellers buy up more land to the east of Dale Farm but the new Conservative-run council say no to further planning permission.

1999 - First enforcement notice against a gipsy family. A total of 42 enforcement notices are served by the council and all are appealed.

2002 - Travellers continue to move on to the site and are issued with 12 enforcement notices. All are appealed in August 2002 on the grounds that not enough time is given to comply. By now there are some 80 caravans, mobile homes and chalets at Dale Farm, all without planning permission.

2003 - Government planning inspectors dismiss more appeals for planning permission. The 86 traveller families are given two years to leave the site.



2005 - In June, Basildon District Council votes to evict the 86 Dale Farm families. August 2005 - Travellers secure a temporary injunction preventing eviction until a decision can be taken on whether to grant them a judicial review, which is granted later that year.

2006 - Judicial review rejects the appeals. June 2007 - Basildon council's planning committee vote to evict the travellers from illegal sites at Hovefields, Wickford, and Dale Farm. Billericay, again.

August 2007 - The travellers appeal against the decision and a date is set for a High Court battle at the Royal Courts of Justice. May 2008 - Judge rules Basildon council had not considered various aspects of the travellers' welfare or provided alternative legal sites, ruling they can stay for now. Basildon council appeals.

January 2009 - Basildon District Council wins Court of Appeal hearing and travellers appeal to House of Lords.

Posh to poverty-stricken - the site is home to rich and poor

Cosy homes with all the mod cons

GAZETTE COMMENT



JUDGING from this rubbish-strewn pile of mess in Dale Farm - some would be quick to believe that gypsies live an untidy lifestyle, with unglamorous homes and simple jobs.

But if you put aside all the sweeping generalisations that come with the travelling community, it couldn't be further from the truth.

When the Gazette visited Crays Hill on the morning of the Court of Appeal decision, we found traveller families living in cosy caravans equipped with all the essential facilities, cookers, toilets and shower blocks - even Sky TV.

Some even live in posh static homes and chalets that would make even the average homeowner jealous, with large living rooms and two bedrooms.

One family we visited even had a whopping 42-inch LCD television, while other homes were adorned with comfy carpets and elegant furniture.

And while the nation's press descended on the village, proud gypsies paraded the site in luxury

Photo: Anthony Channer



COMFORTABLE: Gazette reporter David Arnold finds the gypsies living in well equipped caravans.

£50,000-plus cars, including top-of-the-range 4x4s and sports cars, with rap music blaring out.

It looked more like a scene from an episode of MTV Cribs than an illegal gipsy site near Billericay.

But on the other side of the coin, some residents here - particularly the elderly - live in poverty.

As the Gazette went from caravan to caravan one

lady, Nora Sheridan, 82, was living with her son Dan in squalid conditions - the stench hit like the heat from an oven door.

Inside Nora sat clasping her chest infection tablets, surrounded by piles of filthy rags and festering pots and pans.

There seems to be a discrepancy here, while some live in relative paradise, others are on the edge.

Running scared

IT'S CLEAR that the presence of travellers has spread fear among the permanent community.

When Ramsden Crays Residents' Association heard the news it agreed to pose for a celebratory picture with a Gazette photographer.

But the photo call was cancelled when organisers couldn't drum up enough people for the snap as residents were too scared of reprisals.

A spokesman for the association said: "We have seen the aggressive and threatening stance the travellers have taken on television and in newspapers and are concerned for the safety of the village."

Gipsies and council tax

IT HAS been one of the biggest bugbears of taxpaying residents for decades: "Why do gypsies get away with not paying tax?"

But after the Gazette did a little digging it appears all of the legal pitches at Dale Farm and Hovefields are registered to pay council tax.

And more surprisingly so are some of the illegal pitches.

A source told us: "The majority of travellers do pay council tax in Basildon because they believe it gives them a false emblem of legitimacy to stay on Green Belt land."

"Even if somebody is living illegally

they are required to pay council tax during their stay."

But one traveller, mum-of-three Margaret Flynn, 28, who has lived on the site illegally for seven years, commented: "Why does the Government bring illegal immigrants in from foreign countries and give them houses and benefits? Some of them are terrorists even."

"I'm not racist but we're not asking the Government for nothing."

"This is our land and all we want out of life is a bit of hospital treatment when we need it and schooling for our children."

Housing relief

HAVING one of Europe's largest traveller camps on your doorstep was not a feature many home owners would want to advertise.

The Court of Appeal ruling is likely to provide some relief for residents living near traveller sites in Dale Farm, Billericay and Hovefields, Wickford, who hope to sell their homes.

One agent said: "It is going to benefit people who own property in Crays Hill. The area has always been a bit cheaper than surrounding locations, but this is likely to provide a bit of a boost and make property more saleable."



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Travellers special

Gipsy's prediction: 'Blood will spill... people will die'

EVICTED bailiffs face a bloody battle to turf people off Green Belt land at Britain's biggest illegal gipsy site, travellers claim.

Defiant gipsies say they will use gun and fire power to stave off the threat of eviction, declaring war on the authorities following last week's Court of Appeal ruling that Basildon council could pursue an eviction after years of legal wrangling.

Michael Sheridan, 25, who has lived at Dale Farm illegally for more than five years, said: "If the bailiffs do come down there's going to be a war."

"Not from me personally, but people I know will quite happily set alight to gas barrels at the entrance. There's going to be big trouble because there are people here that have arms, guns, grenades, you name it."

However, it is not clear whether travellers are simply putting on a brave face.

At a smaller scale eviction at the Hovefields site in Wickford in March 2004, travellers offered no resistance when more than 50 police, bailiffs and mechanical diggers moved on to the site.

But John O'Guire, 35, who drove all the way from Limerick overnight to support his friends and

family boasted: "The bailiffs won't get in here without a fight. We've got thousands of gipsies across the country that will come down and help us fight - there will be a war."

"The longer the council takes to send in the bailiffs the longer we have to prepare. Blood will be spilt, people will die and people will go to prison for murder."

New mum's fears for the safety of babies

Triplets face bleak future

GIPSIES: Our story

JUST as their lives are beginning the future already looks bleak for this trio of tots.

As gipsy Jean Sheridan, 24, cradles triplets David, John and Richard she says, as a family, they have no option but to stay put in their caravan at Dale Farm.

Although she is desperately concerned her eight-week-old babies and her two-year-old daughter Angela could get hurt in a forced eviction, she will stay put until the bitter end as she and the newborn need constant medical attention.

She told the Gazette: "What on earth am I supposed to do?"

"When we heard the news it was just total shock, I just couldn't believe it and I still can't."

"I needed to go to the doctor last week and two of the triplets have hernia problems. What happens to them if they need the hospital? If we have to move away by the side of the road we won't have an address."

"These babies need warmth, electricity and a home to live in, we don't want to be left on the road to die"

Mrs Sheridan gave birth at Basildon hospital two months ago and her caravan is still filled with teddy bears, cards and flowers from well-wishers.

She says it will be heartbreaking to have her home taken away by bailiffs.

She added: "We have nowhere else to go. The babies were born prematurely and they need medical help. Doctors visit several times a week at the moment but if we are chucked out on the road what hope do we have?"

"I can't imagine the babies not having a proper home. We can't live in tents, they would freeze to death. These babies need warmth, electricity and a home to live in. We don't want to be left on the road to die."

Photo: Anthony Channer



HEARTBROKEN: Jean Sheridan with triplets David, John and Richard and daughter Angela, four.

Family devastated by court ruling

FOR mum-of-four Bridget Flynn this will be the second time she has been driven out by the authorities.

Sitting in her static home the single mum compared the impending eviction of her people to the atrocities in Gaza, claiming bailiffs would torch her home leaving her and her family homeless once again.

She was part of a mass eviction in Borehamwood in 2004 but insists her family cannot survive life on

the road any more. "I was devastated after hearing it on the news," she said.

"They want to drag us out but we won't go because we can't go on the road no more."

"We have small children, sick and elderly people and pregnant women."

"I was angry watching John Baron on the news because he was happy to talk about the eviction but no one ever asked him where the council would put us."

"We never get any answers, they just expect us to disappear, but where to?"

Bridget also cares for her cousin Catherine, 68, who she says suffers from severe arthritis and heart problems.

"She can't move on at her age. Her husband is dead and all her relatives and friends live here."

'We will fight on' - see p6 & 7



ANGRY: (l-r) Catherine Flynn, 68, Selina, 13, and Bridget.

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